

intercultural communicative competence may be developed in classroom-based instruction and pedagogical suggestions for future explorations.

What Is Intercultural (Communicative) Competence?

The framework for intercultural (communicative) competence adopted here and in much of the recently published work on telecollaboration is that of Michael Byram as described in his 1997 book *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Byram, who bases his model on the work of van Ek (1986), sets up a dichotomy between the *tourist* and the *sojourner*. The tourist is a traveller to foreign lands who sets out to experience foreign peoples, cultures and artefacts with the hope that these encounters with otherness will enrich his or her current way of life, but not fundamentally alter it. The sojourner, on the other hand, 'produces effects on a society which challenge its unquestioned and unconscious beliefs, behaviours and meanings, and whose own beliefs, behaviours and meanings are in turn challenged and expected to change'. Byram (1997: 3) argues that it is the qualities of the sojourner that constitute intercultural competence, and that this, in turn, is an integral and definitive part of what it means to learn a foreign language:

[Foreign language learning] is centrally concerned with communication in a foreign language. The significance of this is not only the practical question of linguistic competence for communication, central though that is, but also the relationship between the language and the cultural practices and beliefs of a group ... the acquisition of a foreign language is ... the relativisation of what seems to the learner to be the natural language of their own identities, and the realisation that these are cultural, and socially constructed.

Thus, the focus of Byram (1997) is on the ways in which foreign language education can contribute to the development of the qualities of the sojourner in the foreign language learner and how those qualities can be assessed in institutional settings.

Byram's framework consists of the following four aspects: (1) *abstract principles* that contribute to the processes of *decentring* (e.g. Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Byram, 1989; Kohlberg *et al.*, 1983), i.e. the ability to relate to and understand the other and to relativise one's own beliefs, practices, values and meanings when faced with those of the other; (2) *curricular objectives* for the institutionalised instruction of intercultural competence; (3) concrete examples of *learner behaviours* that might 'count as' evidence of the development of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997: 57); and

(4) *methods of assessment* for the development of intercultural competence in the institutionalised setting. It should be emphasised that Byram does not envision the teaching of intercultural competence as the simple conveyance of a fixed set of facts about dominant social groups in the foreign culture; instead, he places equal emphasis on equipping learners with the means to access, analyse, compare and evaluate whatever cultural artefacts, practices, values, beliefs or meanings they might encounter (e.g. elite as well as marginalised segments of societies). In effect, Byram stresses *method* as well as *essence* and *object* in the instruction of intercultural competence.

The model consists of five distinct but interdependent principles. These are: (1) *attitudes*, (2) *knowledge*, (3) *skills of discovery and interaction* and (4) *skills of interpreting and relating*. The interplay of the first four principles ideally should lead to the fifth, namely, *critical cultural awareness* or an *evaluative orientation* (Byram, 1997: 43) toward the examination of difference, where learners' evaluative points of reference are made explicit and where the new evaluative orientation toward difference fosters a readiness for political engagement (p. 44). The choice of the word *skills* to designate components of intercultural competence is unfortunate, however, because it carries with it the negative connotation that these components might be 'learnt by a simple technology and transferred unproblematically' from one context to another (Ivanic, 1998: 168), when, in point of fact, intercultural interpretation, relation, discovery and interaction are complex human activities that shape and are shaped by an intimate interface of macro- and microsociological factors, including both history and power (Belz, 2002; Belz & Müller-Hartmann, 2003; Kern, 2000: 249-56; Ware & Kramsch, 2005). In the following paragraphs, each principle of intercultural competence is examined more fully.

Attitudes

Byram states that attitudes of *curiosity* and *openness* are both necessary preconditions as well as outcomes of intercultural learning, as the success of intercultural communication depends on establishing and maintaining good social relationships. The intercultural speaker, i.e. the speaker who is intercultural competent, must exhibit a 'readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviours', and a 'willingness to suspend belief in one's own meanings and behaviors, and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging' (Byram, 1997: 34; see also Kramsch, 1998). For example, English-speaking American learners in an exchange with Arabic-speaking Qatari learners must suspend their belief in the meanings that they might